

Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11
 The Spirit of the Lord God is Upon Us
 December 13, 2020
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 The Audacity of God

May the God...

Good Morning!

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
 because the Lord has anointed me;
 God has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
 to bind up the brokenhearted,

To comfort all who mourn...
 To give them a garland instead of ashes,
 the oil of gladness instead of mourning
 the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit...

They shall build up the ancient ruins,
 they shall raise up the former devastations;
 they shall repair the ruined cities,
 the devastation of many generations...

These are the words of a human being, a poet, a prophet, from oh so long ago, as Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann says, "Here speaks a human agent authorized and energized to do God's transformative work in the community of God's people." (Isaiah 40-66: Westminster Bible Companion, p 213, 1998) A poet, a prophet, a person like you, like me, knowing, telling, offering, proclaiming to all that they must act-- for God has called them, touched them and anointed them. Anointed them to live out God's transforming hope for our world.

That person, speaks and acts and it came to be: the oppressed were released, the brokenhearted caressed and cared for, and the cities pock marked and marred with generations of destruction were renewed, reformed, rebuilt, and made whole. The Israelites returned from exile, they rebuilt their city and temple, they renewed it all, bit by bit just as the prophet said.

These same words: the spirit of the Lord is upon me, God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, uttered by the poetic prophet in 540 BCE, are said again, almost 6 centuries later by Jesus of Nazareth as he begins his ministry. We are the inheritors of this dream.

Jesus is coming again into our world, in the oddest of all Advents, we still prepare to experience again Jesus being born into our world. What if this time, this year, when we

sing O Holy Night, and see the stars so brightly shining, what if we feel that thrill of hope, and rejoice in a new and glorious morn, what if we do more than fall on our knees, what if we rejoice and begin to do what the prophet foretold and Jesus proclaimed.

What if we let go of the anesthesia of nostalgia and cease to say and lament, “O we were an amazing church: once upon a time, famous people came here and accomplished important deeds.”

History is important, we must know it, but we cannot be seduced into believing that the time before was better than the time that is now. We must honor and relinquish the past and turn toward the future: Leaks in Egypt is no good reason to fail to do the work to enter into the Promised Land.

Advent, here and now is preparing once again to encounter Jesus, to accept Jesus, belong to Jesus, to commit our lives to embodying Jesus’ audacious claim and call for something more

What might it feel like were we no longer seeing the deaths of so many people. So many perishing, that we may be numb to comprehending all the dreams and love that has died and all of the people who no longer breathe or laugh or cry, for they have been killed by COVID-19.

I wonder how differently we might act, how we might rage, if, as one commentator said, if four packed 747s fell from our skies, day after day after day. This past week five 9/11s have happened, with 15,966 people taking their last breath. Where is the gentle care and deep compassion we associate with our friends and in our communities in our country when a tragic loss occurs? It is in those moments of massive, catastrophic loss, that we know that people [Americans] always ask: How can I help? What can I do? Then as people of faith we say, “I will pray.” We can pray. And we can do. A simple act of praying and doing begins with slipping a bit of elastic over each ear and wearing a mask.

What if wearing a mask was our country’s simple, national prayer?

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me....to comfort all who mourn...to give them a garland instead of ashes, oil of gladness instead of mourning.

The prophet says, “They shall build up the ancient ruins....the devastation of many generations...”

What might it look like in 2021 to reverse the fortunes of cities and as the prophet said o so many years ago to “repair the devastation of generations?” Name a city or town whose fortunes you long to reverse. What might we—who follow Jesus, who prepare for Jesus, what might we do?

What could our world be like if / when we are no longer rolling in the ashes of polarity and political antagonism?

How might our spirits, that are faint, subdued, parched by isolation and fear, be filled with praise, overflowing with God's audacious claim and call for something more?

It is for us to act, to know as followers of Jesus, God's word, who became flesh, who was born in a barn, barns filled with animals not unlike the many we can pass daily is this amazing state of ours. Our God born in a barn, challenging the world as it was, so that it might be something more. That work began, but now, that work is upon us, the words of the prophet Isaiah the words that Jesus offered as he began his ministry,

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, for God has anointed me, to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, those words are now ours to live and embody. Not poetry, not metaphor, but embodied, enacted, incarnated actions for us to live.

God Comes and bestow the spirit, God Anoints, God comes again into the world so that we might act now.

It is time for us, for people of faith, to move beyond the paralyzing anesthesia of nostalgia, of what we think our world was, it is time instead to, turn our voices, our hopes, actions and prayers toward the world to come, the world that our Lord God has foretold.

The spirit of the Lord God is upon us, God has anointed me, you, to bring and to do good news.

Amen.